SUMMER CAMPS FOR BOYS

Their Educational Value

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New York

Reprinted from

AMERICAN EDUCATION

for March, 1906

American Education

FROM KINDERGARTEN TO COLLEGE

VOL. IX. MARCH, 1906 No. 7

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TO educate means not simply to teach, in the restricted sense of imparting information—to educate means "to bring up." And the process of education must include *in*struction, and *de*velopment, and training—mental, moral, and physical.

It is the object of this paper to show that, except for the simple imparting of formal book knowledge, there are no conditions under which, in an equal period of time, a boy can be carried further in the process of education for life more surely and truly than at a well conducted summer camp for boys.

In the following paper we will discuss the value to a boy of life in a summer camp owned and conducted by a man with experience in this line of work, who should also be a real educator with sympathy for and a knowledge of boys. We will take it for granted that the site has been carefully selected with a view to healthfulness and attractiveness, and that the camp is fully equipped, and properly conducted—and by this we mean with the highest ideals.

In the education of boys we must realize the close relationship in boyhood between soul and mind and body. A healthy boy is primarily a good animal. The young boy who is not fundamentally a good little animal is lacking in the first requisite for perfect manhood, and needs to be developed physically. There is no place where this can be more surely done than at the summer camp. In camp, the boy, unfettered by the chains which modern civilization so frequently throws around him, is free to receive from nature the benefits she so delights to give.

The boys' clothing at camp is entirely of flannel, and is as light as possible, consistent with warmth. When tramping or climbing among the higher mountains where it is cool, a plain suit of clothes is worn with a flannel shirt. Around camp, on the ball fields, tennis grounds, etc., a simple athletic suit is worn, consisting of a sleeveless shirt, and running pants which are short of the knee, and the little shoes called "sneaks." Mornings and evenings, when it is cool, a sweater, and stockings rolled down below the knee, are worn. On the water frequently even the light sneaks are discarded; and often the boys prefer to wear simply the worsted bathing suit. With such light clothing the young body is as free for motion as could possibly be, and the skin can breathe the fresh air, and absorb vitality from the sun.

As for exercise, there are the tramps and mountain climbing expeditions, and all forms of athletics and water sports, in which the boy may indulge freely, thus gaining, as the Indian boy did in the past, that health and strength and skill which only an out-door life can give. But the leader of the camp plans, in addition, definite physical training for the boys. Each boy should take the special exercises that an examination has shown him to need. Also there is a general drill,

in which, in a definite way, the muscles are developed and trained to respond readily to the will; and by breathing exercises and setting-up drill the body is given an erect carriage. With all the physical development that the boys acquire, both in the formal exercises and in the general sports, they learn to see quickly, to use judgment, to be courageous but not rash, and to control the body and the temper. Take, for example, two forms of exercises, one on land and the other on water, and study their educational possibilities.

The game of basket-ball requires activity of body and mind. The internal organs are exercised and strengthened by the constant trunk bendings in every direction, and the bodily functions are improved. The muscles of the entire body—trunk, neck, legs, and arms—are developed, especially in ability to act quickly. The mind learns the importance of competition (against the opposing team) and the value of co-operation (with the other players on the same side) and is trained to act quickly and accurately, and to control the body. And morally the boy learns to play fairly. If the game of basket-ball is supervised properly by a competent referee or coach, who realizes the educational importance of the game, it is capable of producing greater educational results, not only physically, but especially mentally and morally, than it would be possible to attain in the same amount of time by any kind of formal instruction either from books or by word of mouth. It is the tremendously active *life* of the game that trains the boy in body, mind, and character.

Now let us consider canoeing, as an example of water sport, and see what educational value it may have. Probably the ordinary idea is that canoeing is fun for the boy, but dangerous, and a cause of anxiety to the parent. Let us realize that in very well conducted camp no boy can enter a canoe till he has learned to swim well, and to dive. Then he is given lessons in paddling by a camp counsellor who accompanies him in the canoe. The boy learns a skillful procedure in handling the paddle, and he learns to use his eyes in observation, his mind in judgment, and to be steady. The boy is next taught to take a possible accident coolly by being put through the actual experience of an upset, several times, with a counsellor by his side. The boy is first told carefully several times what to do when upset, and then is practised in doing as told. Thus each one becomes perfectly confident and capable, and is without fear or the possibility of being frightened, for anything that could happen has already happened in his experience. When all this has been accomplished and the boy has proved to the camp leader his ability to handle himself well in a canoe or in the water, and to be a boy who uses judgment and can be trusted, then he is allowed to go in a canoe alone. In such manner the boy is trained, and acquires qualities that are of character.

A mother once sent a lad to camp wishing above everything else that her fun-loving boy would in some way learn to control his ceaseless and almost nervous activity, and learn at least to be able to be serious at times, and to control his impetuous nature. The lad learned to swim and to dive, and then wanted to use a canoe, and was sure he could "go it alone." He was warned, but allowed to try, under supervision. In a minute a careless motion caused an upset and a ducking, and the first lesson of caution and self-control had been learned. With practice the lad acquired a steady and knowing eye, that could observe the coming puffs of wind and uneven waves, and a poise of body that could prevent mishaps, and a strength and skill of stroke that enabled him to handle his canoe with remarkable dexterity. The healthy camp life and general training had quieted the boy's nerves, and the practice in canoeing especially had given him the ability to concentrate his mind and control his activities.

Bathing, diet and rest are so regulated that the boy can live this active life without

fatigue or harm in any way, but with, on the contrary, a very distinct gain in health, and strength.

The hours of sleep are early and long, and during the entire summer, night as well as day, the boy breathes the vital air of forest and mountain. At call in the morning, after a short period of exercise (in most camps), a "dip" is taken in a cool spot in the lake, and the body given a rub-down in the still cool morning air. Even delicate boys profit by this, the exercise preventing "taking cold," and the procedure never having any ill effect, and doing much to harden the system. The boys dress quite warmly, put blankets out to air, and sit down for a simple breakfast. After breakfast squad duty keeps all hands busy, for (excepting the cook) there are no servants in camp, and each man must do his share to keep things in order. The work is soon over, and then comes the day of sport. The noon swim is one of the best-liked activities of camp. The sun bath which follows is enjoyed as naturally as the swim. After this blankets are brought in and bunks made up, and dinner is ready. All meals are prepared with a view to giving the growing boy the food he needs, without any of the harmful things which make up so great a part of modern civilized diet, and the fare is most heartily enjoyed. And it is quite possible, even with a large party of boys, for the meals to be quiet and orderly. Under proper leadership boys from homes of culture will return from camp no less refined. After dinner a period of rest is most valuable. By such means vitality is gained.

Some camps have a regular school session. This may be necessary for some boys. But it is preferable for a boy at camp to be free from such work as is done at school during the winter. A work shop should be part of the equipment, however, for the boys like to learn to make things, and this is valuable. Nature study of all kinds, and instruction in practical camping and woodcraft is most valuable and attractive to the boys. In the limited space of this article it will not be possible to go into details concerning nature study, but the general plan may be considered. The writer's method is to have but little formal instruction, but to give "talks," either while resting on an outing, or around the camp-fire at night, the subject being such as is suggested by some event, or condition of the weather, or scene, or question asked. An outline of the subjects to be covered during the summer is kept by the leader, and, after a talk, at night, the subject covered that day is checked off. By this method the boys get the instruction without feeling the process—it is a part of the life they are living.

But let us consider for a minute the social life of the boy in camp. How often we find a boy who is ill-adjusted, who does not have the faculty of getting along with other boys or under certain circumstances. For instance, the bossy boy; the fussy boy; the mean boy; the moody boy; the selfish boy; or the easily-teased boy. In such an intimate life as that of camp, a boy's disposition is soon known. And the average boy is very democratic, and an unsparing and active critic. It is not that he says much, but his actions speak. The ill-adjusted one soon finds himself out of place. And then we have an unhappy boy, who either becomes miserable, or begins to undergo a process of change. The camp leader who is worthy of the place has an intimate knowledge of boyhood, good powers of observation, sympathy, tact, and strength. He sees the condition, and aids in the process of adjustment. But he has the sense to refrain from interfering with the cruel (?) process of rubbing down which is carried on by the boy crowd, though he has sympathy for the young victim, and gives courage and strength to him, so that he may stand the ordeal, and finally come out a victor. Instead of withdrawing from the fight, the boy has been helped, and has pulled through, and shown good qualities, and has finally made friends—a changed boy, and

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happy. Of such value may the summer camp be in boyhood. In no other place has man such an opportunity for helping the boy in the deepest things of life.

We have now seen how great the opportunities are for the physical development of the boy in camp. We have seen how, through the physical activities and life of camp mental qualities and character may be developed in many ways, especially the fundamental qualities—observation, judgment, self-control, courage, honesty, etc. We have seen also how at camp the boy may find answers to the things he wants to know. And we have seen how, best of all, at camp the boy learns to get along with his fellow man, to adjust himself to necessary circumstances, yet to think and to do so that his life may be a factor for good in the world.

Summer camps for boys are increasing in number. They are coming to occupy a place in the educational world—a place that cannot be filled in any other way. Their educational value may be very great, and in a natural way, for camp life appeals to the very soul of boyhood.